



Recognizing Depression

There are three things everyone should know about depression.

- **Depression is more than the blues.**
- **Depression is not a personal weakness.**
- **Depression is a treatable illness.**

What Are Depressive Illnesses?

Depressive illnesses are serious but treatable disorders. They are more than temporary "blue" moods or periods of grief after a loss. Symptoms of depression affect thoughts, feelings and behaviors, and can have a physical effect on the body. Without treatment, the symptoms can last for months, years or a lifetime. Depressive illnesses come in various forms.

- Some depressive episodes occur suddenly for no apparent reason.
- Some are triggered by a stressful experience.
- Some people have one episode in a lifetime: others have recurrent episodes.
- Some people's symptoms are so severe they are unable to function as usual.
- Others have ongoing, chronic symptoms that do not interfere with functioning but keep them from feeling really well.
- Some people have bipolar disorder (also called manic-depressive illness). They experience cycles of terrible "lows" and inappropriate "highs."

The Symptoms of Depression

The symptoms of depression include:

- Persistent sad or "empty" moods
- Loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities, including sex
- Decreased energy, fatigue and feeling "slowed down"
- Sleep disturbances (insomnia, early-morning waking or oversleeping)
- Eating disturbances (loss of appetite and weight, or weight gain)
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering and making decisions
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Irritability
- Excessive crying
- Chronic aches and pains that don't respond to treatment

A thorough diagnosis is needed if five or more of the symptoms of depression persist for more than two weeks, or if they are interfering with work or family life. A good diagnosis involves a complete physical checkup and a review of the family history of health problems.

Depression often co-occurs with medical, psychiatric and substance abuse disorders, though it is frequently unrecognized and untreated. This can lead to unnecessary suffering since depression is usually treatable, even when it co-occurs with other problems.

Depressed Persons Need to Get Help

The very nature of depressive illnesses can interfere with a person's ability or wish to get help. Depression saps energy and self-esteem and makes a person feel tired, worthless, helpless and hopeless. Therefore:

- Seriously depressed people need encouragement from family and friends to seek treatment to ease their pain.
- Some people need even more help, becoming so depressed that they must be taken for treatment.
- Don't ignore suicidal thoughts, words or acts. Seek professional help immediately.

This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for medical, psychiatric, psychological or behavioral healthcare advice, or as a substitute for consultation with a qualified professional.

